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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LISBON 001565

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SUBJECT: TFLE01: PORTUGUESE FOREIGN MINISTER DISCUSSES
MIDDLE EAST WITH AMBASSADOR

REF: A) LISBON 1527

Classified By: Ambassador Alfred Hoffman for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

11. (C) Portuguese Foreign Minister Luis Amado told the Ambassador on July 27 that the extraordinary EU meeting on the Middle East planned for August 1 must devise a common EU position and avoid divisions with the United States. He said Hezbollah must be disarmed and an international force deployed to southern Lebanon, and that the international community must work on a cease-fire. He said he "understands" the U.S. position that a cease-fire must be part of a proposal for a lasting peace, but thought the EU might settle on a different formula. End Summary.

12. (U) The Ambassador called on Foreign Minister Luis Amado on July 27 to discuss recent developments in the Middle East and to receive a readout on a July 23 meeting between Prime Minister Socrates and Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez. The Foreign Minister's comments regarding the Socrates-Chavez meeting are reported septel. The Ambassador was accompanied by political/economic counselor; Amado was joined by his Chief of Staff, Francisco Ribeiro de Menezes.

13. (C) The Ambassador welcomed Amado's initiative in pressing for an extraordinary meeting of EU foreign ministers to devise an effective response to the current violence in Israel and Lebanon. Such a move signaled Portugal's intention to try to shape the EU response to critical international developments, rather than simply to adhere to an EU consensus forged by other member states. Yes, the Foreign Minister replied, the EU must play a stronger role in the search for a lasting solution in the Middle East. He said his objectives in pushing for the extraordinary EU meeting were to build a consensus EU approach and to avoid divisions in the Euro-Atlantic relationship. It is essential, he said, that Europe and the United States speak with one voice not only on the current Israel-Lebanon crisis, but also in dealing with an array of other serious global challenges. Europe and the United States have their differences, he said, but what is important is that we agree on the fundamental issues. He reiterated earlier assurances to the Ambassador that he is very committed to a strong transatlantic relationship.

14. (C) The Ambassador criticized Hezbollah for locating its facilities and personnel among civilians, using their own people as shields in an attempt to turn public opinion against Israel in the aftermath of Israeli attacks. He

suggested it would be helpful if the Government of Lebanon appealed to Hezbollah to release the Israeli prisoners. It would, Amado replied, but the Lebanese Government is hostage to Hezbollah.

15. (C) The Ambassador asked Amado's reaction to Secretary Rice's position that a cease-fire must be tied to provisions for a lasting peace. "I understand it," Amado replied, "and I won't say anything publicly against it." He said the EU would consider that position carefully "even if we decide on a different formula." Hezbollah, he continued, must be demilitarized and an international force must be deployed to southern Lebanon with the necessary capacity to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. The international community must also work on a cease-fire, he said. He understood that "we are buying time now, but we need to work on a cease-fire."

16. (C) Amado recalled that he had lunched several days earlier with a group of African ambassadors, who expressed serious concern about the public reaction in their countries to the current Middle East crisis. Much of the media coverage in those countries is slanted heavily against Israel, which inevitably has a strong impact on public sentiment about the conflict. Europe and the United States must keep that reality in mind when designing possible solutions, ensuring that our proposals include assistance to other governments in ensuring their populations receive more balanced coverage of developments in the Middle East.

Comment

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17. (C) Amado is a strong advocate of NATO and believes deeply in the importance of good transatlantic ties, but he was clearly not enthusiastic about U.S. refusal to endorse an immediate cease-fire. As he indicated, though, any public remarks will be carefully calibrated to avoid any hint of a disagreement with us. Although Amado did not touch on the topic in this conversation, he has publicly expressed Portugal's willingness to participate in a security force in southern Lebanon (reftel), so long as it is under a UN mandate. His Chief of Staff told us after the meeting that Amado believes such a security force should include a strong European component, but that any decision about the dimension or nature of Portuguese participation would be taken in close consultation with us and others.
Hoffman